

Personal Narrative Account of Frances Linn's life

Created by Jody Thomas

I was born the middle sister of three in the year 1873, less than 10 years after the Civil War. My father was a Methodist minister. I lived in Ohio all the years of my upbringing, attending Ohio Wesleyan College for my undergraduate degree, where after I became a teacher. My parents named me Theodora Frances Burns.

Andrew Linn and I met at college and we graduated in the same class even though he was four years older than I. He was a mathematics genius and excelled in astronomy, too. He had many friends and seemed to draw people into his circle. He was determined to be a lawyer, so off he went to New York for his JD and I took a teaching position in Ohio until he graduated and passed the bar. We married in September, 1896. I was excited to go to New York City to live. Andrew started his own private practice with an office on Broadway. He seemed to know everyone and worked so very hard. I set up house, went to museums, and read everything I could get my hands on. One of the places that left a lasting impression on me was the Lenox Library of rare books. This collection of rare books, including the first original Gutenberg Bible to come to the new world, original manuscripts and Americana, were not for borrowing. However they were on display for all to enjoy and I certainly did enjoy them. We went out with friends, saw plays, went to poetry readings, and had a high time. We expected to become parents, but children didn't come.

In late 1902, I noticed Andrew didn't have the stamina he always had. He got dark circles under his eyes and he woke up tired in the mornings. The doctor suggested we go West for some healthful recuperation. We took the train to Los Angeles, where we found the good weather and the clean air to be good for our spirits, but Andrew never got his energy back and he died there in 1903 of tuberculosis. We were married just less than seven years.

I was devastated. I went home, by train, and on the way I thought about what to make of myself now that I was a widow. I would need to support myself and I did not want to teach school. I decided to become a librarian before I reached Ohio.

I enrolled in the New York State Library School, in Albany, before the year was out and graduated in 1904. I took my first library position in Ohio, and worked near my family home for one year. When the job posting for Santa Barbara came through the alumni bulletin, I applied. The Trustees hired me, sight unseen and after a summer in Europe taking in the great libraries and museums, I was on my west again, for a real adventure.

I arrived in Santa Barbara by train on Saturday evening, September 1 and went right to my lodgings. I had rented a room in a boarding home on Garden Street. On Sunday, I unpacked my trunk and walked the town, getting my bearings. Monday morning, Labor Day (which was a holiday in 1906), I was on the job, taking stock of the library. The new methods of librarianship had much improved from years prior, when the means used for keeping record of the day's

circulation consisted of beans dropped into bottles labeled with the classes of books, such as history, fiction, literature, etc. and at the end of the day the beans were counted. Even in 1906, here in Santa Barbara, the library books were under lock and key. Patrons could not browse the collection. I put a stop to that immediately. The old conception of a Library as a collection of books had entirely given place to the more modern idea of a library as a selection of books made useful.

Newly out of library school, I had many ideas about efficiencies and modern methods. Having seen the town, I knew the library could be and should be larger, the reach and scope of the library increased, and more culture brought to this growing community. My mind was set afire with the possibilities before me and so I set to work right away.

Within the year, I had plans in place for enlarging the current building and in 1908 the building renovations were completed, the library refurnished and the different departments rearranged. We now had a reference corner and a room for younger readers. Everyone seemed to praise the changes and there was a general good will all about. Several hundred people visited the building during our housewarming on March 26, 1908. We managed the library with a staff of four, myself included. Miss Harriet Long, Miss Della Chambers and Miss Clara Morris worked alongside me, and just as diligently.

In my annual report to the board my first year, I noted 4767 patrons with borrowing privileges who checked out 61,500 books, or an average of twelve books to each individual. The library was closed only three days.

An Act to provide "County Library Systems" was approved by the California Legislature in April, 1909. The Sacramento Free Public Library in 1908 demonstrated the feasibility and usefulness of this plan, but Santa Barbara County had the honor to be the first to take action under the county library law. The Trustees of the Santa Barbara Free Public Library were given the authority to contract with the Board of Supervisors of the County to extend the privileges of the library to all residents of the county. The contract was signed July 1, 1910 and the county department of this library was established.

The first stations were opened for the circulation of books in Carpinteria, Summerland, Montecito, Goleta, Naples, Santa Ynez, Los Alamos, Los Olivos, Lompoc, Betteravia, Orcutt, Pinal, and Santa Maria. In addition, a small collection of books was sent to Wasioja to take the place of the traveling library since the recall from the State Library had left the people of Wasioja without library service and they were 65 miles from Santa Maria, the nearest library. Service from the Central Library was had once a week when books specially requested were sent, if possible. A few new books were added to each collection each month and once in three months, books which had served their usefulness in a community could be exchanged for other books in the county collection. In most cases, books could be sent by train, and those locations away from the train could be reached by stage.

In addition, I was tasked with getting the Orange Signs created and sent out to all the counties in California. These signs would be the signal that a branch library had been set up in the community. They would be in classrooms, waiting rooms, and reading rooms all over the state.

They would be promoted as “Under the Orange Sign”. I sent hundreds of letters back and forth to libraries all over the State, describing our proposition, then taking orders, collecting money, and finally sending out those orange signs.

In addition to the small branches, there were also construction camps and oil leases and little groups of homesteaders far away from ordinary lines of travel. They couldn’t be left out of any plan for getting books to all people who wanted them and would make good use of them. It was not easy. At Gibraltar Construction Camp, where the City of Santa Barbara bored through the mountains, the men were building a dam and reservoir. The books were delivered with the men, through four miles of a 5 by 7 foot hole in the mountain. The book packages were carefully wrapped to protect them from water drips and sparks. Books were also loaned to oil ship crews, for the 40 day trip to Honolulu and back. By 1919, there would be 73 distribution points in the county where we delivered books.

With the County Library Department in place, the State disbanded the traveling libraries to Santa Barbara County. However, we still borrowed titles from the state library collection. The state paid transportation of the books back and forth. Some of the books we were not justified in purchasing because of the cost and others due to the special or limited use to our patrons.

I became the Vice-President of the California Library Association in 1910. I also began offering six-month apprenticeships to train library assistants. The hope was to introduce our hometown girls to library work, a first-step toward library training, testing their aptitude and liking for the work.

I turned my attention to growing the collections, adding periodicals, increasing County stations such that it became evident to all that a new building was necessary. Land and sufficient funds were needed to build a proper library. Santa Barbara was growing quickly and now had more than 12,000 residents and the library had the sympathies of the citizens. A fund was begun to build a library as a major institution. Correspondence with the Carnegie Corporation was netting results, with encouraging words sent from the East. I could not have been more pleased.

That summer, I took a two month leave of absence to visit my family in Ohio, and as part of my reason for going, I visited 10 beautiful libraries in the country, including the newly opened New York Public Library, the New York State Library, the Carnegie Library in Pittsburgh and public libraries in Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Denver, Portland and Oakland. My aim was to see what was new, what was worthwhile, and what features we might implement in our library in Santa Barbara. “I was impressed with the fact that the library can be the means of building up the neighborhood life and community spirit. It can be the common interest in the small towns where differences of creed and politics and social position separate people, dissipating the forces for good.”

During the Progressive era, the Efficiency Movement was sweeping the nation. Melville Dewey (of the Dewey Decimal System), Theodore Roosevelt, and Andrew Carnegie were advocates and practitioners. The Efficiency Movement sought to identify and eliminate waste in all areas of the economy and society, and to develop and implement best practices. For some, this included

spelling efficiencies. I'd like to show you a letter we received from James Bertram of the Carnegie Corporation, as one of many correspondences in obtaining a commitment for funds for a new library.

You can see peculiar spellings such as BILDING and PURPOS... But also, you can see we *did* receive a large grant from the Carnegie Corporation, with the stipulation of a commitment from the City Fathers to match contributions of \$50,000 for the building and support the library with \$5000 annually. We were going to have our library!

I was away from Santa Barbara when the news was announced, but I received a cable from a friend which read: "We send the Angel of Santa Barbara a thousand delighted congratulations on the library future. We know very well whose personality and devotion wrought wonders in minds and hearts of city and county that assured this triumph. May your deserved vacation be flavored by our admiring affection. Our warm regards to that lovely sister of yours. Why don't you bring her out here for keeps?"

Back in California, and ready to begin in earnest on our new Library, I received this letter from a fellow California Library Association board member, cautioning me to be attentive to the plans. She wrote: "From the depths of my experience, I would say, first and last and all the time, do *not* assume that your architect knows much about libraries. He understands about strength of materials and the like, but he probably will not know whether he is allowing the proper distance between stacks, nor the proper length of a bookshelf, nor the angle of a newspaper reading desk. For instance, ours fixed the addition so it is just too narrow for the five stacks the main room accommodated, and the orderly lines of stacks have to be broken. Besides, he did not allow for wall shelving. At that stage in the game I trusted architects, so I did not correct this. You will find in the architects' pocketbooks, Kidders and others, all sorts of figures and tables, and these you will find of value in firing at your menfolk.

The original sketches for the current building were the gift of an Eastern architect named Henry Hornbostel. I sent blueprints to many of the librarians I had met on my trip East, and they responded with various ideas, which I was able to use when Francis W. Wilson revised the plans. He and I worked together on every detail. We broke ground in September, 1916.

Truth be told, I began laying plans for a grand, new building almost immediately after taking the helm as the City Librarian. The library trustees were informed of this from early on and it was helpful in securing the Carnegie grant. As they stated in their letter to Mr. James Bertram in January of 1916, "the Spirit of California, her people and their homes, is invitation and hospitality. Our library must express this from every viewpoint. Our librarian has given nine years of study to the problem and our present plans are the result of her efforts assisted through conference with the best librarians of the country. Her conclusions of the requirements were the basis of all our plans."

Financially, funding came from:

Carnegie Corporation-----\$50,000.

Clarence Black, the land-----valued at \$14,250.

Clarence Black, pledged for Art Gallery -----estimated \$30,000.

Chamber of Commerce paid for the old site --\$20,000.
Bequests and Donations-----\$1,380.40
Tax levies for 2 years 1916 & 1917----- \$10,000.
Special tax subject to vote held in October 1917-----\$20,564.

The estimated costs for the entire plan, including proposed art museum, landscaping, furniture and fixtures came to \$146,194.63. The Kier Construction Company of San Diego was awarded the contract for the building of the new Carnegie Library. The building was to be part basement, with two stories, and a patio; Concrete foundation, brick walls, plastered exterior, clay tile, structural steel, wrought iron balconies, oak trim, art glass sky lights, composition and wood floors, and steam heat.

We closed the doors of the old building on August 20 and opened the new building to the public at 9 o'clock August 27, 1917, without ceremony of any kind. It had taken the effort of many to move all the books and get them on the shelves in a week. However, it was the first day of school and although the lighting was not installed, I felt it important for the children of Santa Barbara have a place to study after school. We closed early in those days due to darkness in the evening. The skylights provided ample light during the day.

Additionally, opening the new library ahead of completed construction provided continued support of the war effort. We had been raising money through the Library War Service fund. By October, we had a special table for the use of the Santa Barbara Women's Committee members of the Councils for National and State Defense. There were several books and magazines on the subject on display as well as bulletins, and books dealing with food conservation and other important matters. The Junior Red Cross members also had a table dedicated to making useful articles for soldiers who are now serving at the French front and for those who would soon go abroad. Everyone seemed eager to do their best to aid the government.

The cost of war prohibited us from completing the tympanum over the entrance to the library. Instead, we hung flags of the Allies until after the war. In 1923, a donation was made for half the funds required, and the City Council appropriated the other half, so that the carving, painting and gilding was completed in 1924. Above the door, today, and please go take a long look, is a Coat of Arms of the City surrounded by the symbols of four famous and ancient libraries of the old world, with idealized statues of Plato representing philosophy and literature and Aristotle, representing science and history.

My passion for library work was immediate. But coming to live in California and make my life here was done out of near reckless sense of adventure. With neither husband nor children, I was alone and needed something comprehensive and considerable to occupy my mind.

Along with literature and books, history and culture, education and travel, I also had an interest in gardening. Living here in the California climate, I was able to grow flowers the year round. The Library was made more beautiful continuously by flowers, always choice, often rare, brought by friends from their gardens, small and large. I initiated the Shakespeare Flower Festival for the Shakespeare tercentenary. I invited gardeners from around the city to bring in a vase of flowers or herbs mentioned in any of Shakespeare's works, with the quotation affixed,

to be displayed. This became an annual spring event. A little later today, the UCCE Master Gardeners will give you a taste of what I began over 100 years ago.

In 1924, the over door was finally completed and then, of course, came 1925 and the great earthquake. There was much damage to so many buildings, people hurt and displaced and several people died. Santa Barbara was both in shock and a flurry of activity. On that June morning, I was grateful the earthquake took place so early in the day and only the custodian was in the library at the time. I quickly got dressed and rushed to the library to find this. Our custodian escaped with his life. The Library's west wall had collapsed and part of the east wall, as well. However, much of the fixtures and fittings, furniture and structure was salvageable.

Clearly it would take time to repair the damage and rebuild. We entertained the idea of erecting a temporary building on the lawn next to the library, as there didn't seem to be any available space in town. One of the trustees remembered Dr. George Knapp offered the free use of his property at Sola and Chapala Streets. We adjourned our meeting immediately to inspect the premises. It was determined the eight horse stable with hayloft would be quite suitable to serve as our temporary library. It survived the earthquake with no damage, but just needed some cleaning. We placed a newspaper article requesting patrons not return their books until we had relocated. In the meantime, my assistants and I picked up glass inside the library, and helped at the first aid station outside the library. We cleaned each book, determining what to take to the stable and marking those with chalk. These were boxed up with new fruit crates lent by the Johnson Fruit Company, and transported to our temporary quarters and organized on the shelves we had put in place. Those same boxes were pressed into service with the remaining books for the duration of the library reconstruction. With much help, we moved into the stables and were open for business by the first week of August, six weeks after the earthquake. The stables had been painted, plumbers had installed toilet rooms, electricians installed lights, and the cement floor had been repaired. Card catalogues, magazine racks, tables, chairs and 20,000 books were in place. There was even an outdoor reading area, shaded with oak and olive trees. It was something of a miracle. The patrons were delighted at being again in the library and many quietly gave a little money toward the restoration.

I divided my time between the two locations on those long days, working with construction crews, architects, city council, board of trustees, staff and volunteers, making sure the old library would be rebuilt better than new and that service continued to our high standards in the stable.

Carlton Winslow was the architect who designed the plans for reconstruction. Work was completed in September 1926, in little over a year.

Christmas was always a special time. The first Christmas in the new building, I asked Mr. Samuel Ilsley, one of the trustees, to read Dickens' "Christmas Carol". We had a capacity audience. Later in the evening, the Girls' Glee club came to the courtyard and sang Christmas carols. And since 1929, the library would be open on Christmas Day. Fires roared in the two fireplaces, copper trays of apples, which were brought by the Friends of the Library, were placed in the reading rooms, and decorated trees and magnolia garlands adorned the windows and columns. In accordance with an old world custom, I planted wheat on Saint Barbara's Day,

December 4, which would then adorn the crèche in its place of honor. I tried to copy Botticelli's painting of the nativity. Books could not be checked out, but many residents would spend an hour or two (or more) quietly reading in the festive atmosphere.

I made several trips to Europe over the years, bringing back rare books, paintings of Saint Barbara, and other beautiful pieces to add to the library collections. My sister, Katherine, who never married, came to live with me in Santa Barbara after our parents died.

In 1929, we were able to add the Art Galleries, which adjoined the art library. This was made possible by a gift of \$55,000 from Mary Faulkner Gould. The gallery was designed by Myron Hunt, who also designed the Huntington Library in San Marino. Construction was completed in October 1930 when finally the Library was complete. There was no art museum in Santa Barbara at that time. The opening exhibit in the gallery was admirable and worthy and impressive to all who were able to partake.

At all times the library has contributed to the recreational, educational, and cultural life of Santa Barbara. A story illustrates the pride of the community in its public library. Two women met at a local hotel, one for many years a resident of the city and the other, a visitor. The newcomer remarked with enthusiasm on the delights of the climate and the natural beauties to which rhapsody the Santa Barbara woman assented with characteristic loyalty and exclaimed: "Yes, God has done pretty nearly everything for us here. But have you seen our public library? That's all to our credit."

More and more our library embodied the avowed purposes of the free public library: 1. To help people be happy, 2. To help them to become wise, and 3. To encourage them to be good.

Thank you for your support and patronage of the Santa Barbara Free Public Library.

Yours, truly

Frances Burns Linn, Librarian

Mrs. Frances Linn Dies in Rest Home

Mrs. Frances Burns Linn, 88, who dedicated 35 years of her life to building and improving Santa Barbara's city-county library, died Friday morning at a local rest home after a long illness. Her home was at 1821 Olive St.

Mrs. Linn took charge of the Santa Barbara library in 1906 and held that position for three and a half decades, a period of rapid growth for the library — and one involving much construction and relocation, as well as a major earthquake.

She relinquished her duties only when forced to do so by a stroke, suffered in 1941.

Mrs. Linn was born Sept. 26, 1873, in Lima, Ohio, the daughter of the Rev. George W. Burns, a Methodist minister, and Helen Scott Burns.

WED IN 1896

She was graduated from Ohio Wesleyan College in 1893 with honors and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa.

After teaching for three years in a grammar school in Athens, Ohio, she married Andrew Linn, a college classmate, on Sept. 1, 1896. The couple made their home in New York City, where Mr. Linn established his law practice at 100 Broadway. Mr. Linn died in Los Angeles in 1901 after going there for his health.

In 1902, Mrs. Linn entered the New York Library School in Albany and then worked for a year in the public library in Norwalk, Ohio. Following a summer abroad, she came to the Santa Barbara Public Library in September, 1906.

At the time Mrs. Linn took charge, the Santa Barbara Public Library occupied a new building on Carrillo Street just west of the present Masonic Temple. A reading room was added in 1908 and, in 1910, Santa Barbara became the first county to organize a county department under the new state law of 1909.

Under her librarianship, the building at the corner of Anacapa and Anapamu Streets was erected. Prior to its construction, Mrs. Linn went East to visit libraries and study designs and latest facilities.

REBUILT AFTER QUAKE

After the 1925 earthquake, the building was rebuilt in Spanish Renaissance style with its well-known outdoor reading room or patio as a special feature. For a time after the earthquake, the library functioned with orange boxes for shelves in the stables of the former Edward Spaulding house on Chapala Street, then owned by George Owen Knapp.

Addition of the Faulkner Memorial Art Wing, started in 1929 and completed in 1930 with an exhibition by resident artists, climaxed Mrs. Linn's career in Santa Barbara.

In 1940, Ed Ainsworth, Los Angeles Times columnist, wrote of Mrs. Linn: "She has made Santa Barbara conscious of good art and has already acquired a notable art gallery for transient exhibits. She has been a leading spirit in the newest civic adventure — acquiring and furnishing a real art gallery for the community."

For years, Mrs. Linn held positions of leadership on innumerable committees and boards in Santa Barbara. Among those she served as an officer and board member were Neighborhood House, the Recreation Center, the Community Arts Assn., the Community Chest, the Santa Barbara Woman's Club and the American Assn. of University Women, of which she was past president of the local branch. In 1916, Mrs. Linn became president of the California Library Assn. and for many years was active in that organization.

UNIQUE CUSTOMS

Development of the joint city-county library system, pioneered during her term as librarian, received national attention.

Among the unique customs she observed annually at the library was the Shakespeare flower show, which she originated as tercentenary observance. Santa Barbarans grew special flowers and herbs mentioned in Shakespeare's works to include in the exhibition.

She also instituted an annual Christmas open house at the library.

Mrs. Linn voluntarily maintained her own salary at a minimum level of \$300 a month so that more of the city's and county's funds might go to the salaries of her assistants.

When the four children of a friend were orphaned by an influenza epidemic in 1919, Mrs. Linn assisted in their support until they had received their college educations.

Mrs. Linn was making progress toward recovery from her stroke in 1941 when she fell and broke her hip, an injury from which she never recovered.